

# The Coins of Christmas

By Gerald Tebben

Collectors are blessed when it comes to Christmas. The hobby provides a multitude of possible gifts to give and receive. There are also numerous numismatic objects that are touched by and reflect the spirit of the season. Some date from the time of the birth of Christ. Others are associated with the holiday's celebration over the centuries.

# Caesar Augustus



This bronze as, issued in Rome in 7 B.C., shows Augustus on the obverse. The nearly Very Fine coin sold for \$44 at auction just before last Christmas.

***And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. – Luke 2:1***

The coinage of Caesar Augustus is intimately connected to the birth of Jesus Christ. Augustus, who ruled Rome and its provinces from 27 B.C. to A.D. 14, is named in the first line of Luke's account of the nativity.

Augustus' coinage is plentiful and inexpensive. With a little searching, circulated bronze and silver coins bearing his portrait can be obtained for less than \$100.

# Bob Cratchit's pay



This Extra Fine 1843 half crown fetched \$460 at auction in 2011 and resold for \$690 in 2013.

*"You'll want all day tomorrow, I suppose?" said Scrooge.*

*"If quite convenient, Sir."*

*"It's not convenient," said Scrooge, "and it's not fair. If I was to stop half-a-crown for it, you'd think yourself ill-used, I'll be bound?" - A Christmas Carol*

Ebenezer Scrooge paid Bob Cratchit a pittance – half a crown a day.

That famous fictional half crown was a middling size silver coin that showed the queen on the obverse and the English shield on the reverse. The Tower Mint in London struck 455,000 half crowns in 1843, the year Charles Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol*.

The half crown (2 shillings, 6 pence) was the equivalent of about 60 cents in U.S. coin at the time.

# 20th century gifts of the magi



If Della had this coin in her tiny hoard, she should have held onto it. The PCGS MS 66+ red piece fetched \$6,168.75 at auction Sept. 5.

***“One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies .... Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.” – O. Henry’s *The Gift of the Magi****

O. Henry began his Christmas tale *The Gift of the Magi* on a numismatic note. The short story appeared in the Dec. 10, 1905, edition of *The New York Sunday World*.

Della famously sells her hair to buy a \$21 platinum fob for Jim’s watch, and Jim sells his watch to buy a comb for Della’s hair.

With a mintage of 80.7 million the 1905 Indian cent is a common coin. Every one is a Christmas coin and a worthy gift of the magi.

# Christmas – a celebration fine



This VF25 Willow Tree shilling sold for \$164,500 in May.

*For preventing disorders, arising in several places within this jurisdiction by reason of some still observing such festivals as were superstitiously kept in other communities, to the great dishonor of God and offense of others: it is therefore ordered by this court and the authority thereof that whosoever shall be found observing any such day as Christmas or the like, either by forbearing of labor, feasting, or any other way, upon any such account as aforesaid, every such person so offending shall pay for every such offence five shilling as a fine to the county. - General Court, Massachusetts Bay Colony, May 11, 1659*

Christmas day wasn't always a day of celebration. Puritans considered winter revelry pagan and papist and outlawed celebrating the day, going so far as to fine offenders five shillings. That fine in lightly circulated 1653-1660 Willow Tree shillings would be worth more than \$1 million to collectors today.

# Santa's paper money



'Twas the night  
before Christmas,  
when all through the  
house  
Not a creature was  
stirring, not even a  
mouse;  
The stockings were  
hung by the chimney  
with care,  
In hopes that St.  
Nicholas soon would  
be there.

The modern celebration of Christmas as a holiday, was formed in no small part on Dec. 23, 1823, when *A Visit from St. Nicholas*, also known as *The Night Before Christmas*, was published in the Troy, N.Y., Sentinel.

The poem established that Santa Claus rode in a sleigh pulled by eight reindeer, magically rose up chimneys and carried a pack of toys for good little girls and boys.

Images inspired by the poem were placed on notes issued by more than 20 banks in eight states before the Civil War, when federal bills replaced privately issued bank notes.

(This note sold for \$6,900 in

2012)